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An open secret Moscow's subterranean bunker system revealed

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At the opening of his talk on “Secret Government Bunkers,” historian Dmitry Yurkov warned his audience that its provocative title wasn’t exactly true. “These bunkers are obviously no longer secret,” he said, “otherwise, I wouldn’t be sitting in front of you — but instead lying face down, in handcuffs, with my hands behind my head.” “We only deal with declassified documents,” he explained. Yurkov, founder of the Moscow-based Museum of Modern Fortification, gave his talk at the museum’s underground screening room “Bunker 703” on April 18, 2021. The talk was later [uploaded](#) to the museum’s YouTube Channel, “Underground Moscow.” Ten months later, Roskomnadzor, Russia’s censorship authority, attempted to block the video. In correspondence with YouTube’s legal support service, the agency claimed that Yurkov’s talk disclosed state secrets, citing a court decision.

The lecture on “secret government bunkers”
Underground Moscow

The censors' attempt to suppress the video

On February 14, 2022, a Roskomnadzor employee tasked with maintaining a registry of banned information sent an email to his colleague with eight attachments. One of them was a text file documenting a Moscow court ruling about the content of two Web pages:

- <https://youtube.com/watch?v=VpzoTOA1cLM>
- <http://podzemnayamoskva.ru/author/dmitro/>

The first URL was a link to Yurkov's talk on secret bunkers. The second was the Web address for “Underground Moscow,” a page listing other posts by Yurkov. (The page appears to have since been taken down.) The accompanying message suggested the two links should be included in the registry of banned information, though the grounds of the court decision were not exactly clear:

The court decision shows that the specified Web addresses contain data subject to being classified, [...] used in the interest of the country's defense, constituting state secrets, and not subject to declassification. But the decision doesn't specify which material constitutes a state secret.

On February 18, 2022, Roskomnadzor attempted to block Yurkov's page on the “Underground Moscow” website, but within three days, the department abandoned those plans. Roskomnadzor also wrote to YouTube's legal support service, requesting that it block user access to Yurkov's talk, threatening to block YouTube “on the territory of the Russian Federation” in case of non-compliance. In response, YouTube asked the agency to send over a scanned copy of the relevant authority's decision.

On February 24, the first day of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Roskomnadzor employees began to discuss whether it would be worth it to send YouTube a copy of the court decision. Four days later, they told YouTube they couldn't provide the document because the court proceedings had themselves been secret.

Yurkov's talk was last mentioned in leaked Roskomnadzor correspondence in August 2022, in connection with another YouTube video that reportedly disclosed state secrets. We don't know whether Roskomnadzor approached Yurkov or his colleagues directly to request that the recorded lecture be deleted. Yurkov himself did not respond to Meduza's queries.

Is there really something secret in the video?

It's hard to say for sure. The lecture is based on Yurkov's [book](#) "Secret Soviet Bunkers: Special Urban Fortifications from the 1930s–1960s," which he wrote after several years of research based on declassified archival documents. Still, according to a former museum employee, the Prosecutor General's office warned the museum that it was checking the book for signs of divulging state secrets following its release.

In a [live stream](#) from November 2022, Yurkov explained, once again, that he only uses declassified documents in his research:

We're not the ones deciding what can be said about [Metro-2](#). No need to write in the comments: "Don't talk about Metro-2, you'll be arrested." The government decides what can and what can't be made public. The commission that deals with state secrets goes into the archives and makes the decision to stamp documents as "declassified."

That's why we never discuss secret facilities that are currently active. We discuss the history — how it all worked in Soviet times. We're reconstructing Moscow's underground network right up until the 1960s.

Yurkov's talk discussed the following facilities:

- The first secret bunker in Moscow, located behind the Chistye Prudy metro station tunnel walls
- A city command post near Tverskaya Square
- A shelter for Russia's leadership, between the Kremlin Arsenal and the Kremlin Senate buildings
- A shelter for officials near the Kremlin walls
- A government communications center
- A site under the General Staff Building
- A site under the FSB headquarters in Lubyanka Square
- An underground transport system between the Kremlin, Zaryadye Park, the Presidential Administration buildings, and the FSB headquarters
- An underground tunnel for the evacuating Kremlin officials

It's unclear which of these facilities the Moscow court deemed to be secret. Last fall, in a live stream, Yurkov explained that it's the authorities who are responsible for making such information public: "It's not us who declassify documents — it's the government. Any complaints should be addressed to the commission for the protection of state secrets."

Meduza would like to thank the Belarusian collective [Cyberpartisan](#) for providing access to the Roskomnadzor leak and the nonprofit site [Distributed Denial of Secrets](#)

(DDoSecrets) for indexing hundreds of gigabytes of data and organizing convenient access to leaked documents.



It's good to be the president Meduza spoke to contractors who helped build Vladimir Putin's alleged seaside palace. Also, new blueprints reveal a subterranean fortress, multiple 'aqua-discos,' and more.

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